



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE
NEWS
WASHINGTON, DC 20230

**National
Telecommunications &
Information
Administration**

**For Immediate Release
May 12, 2009**

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NTIA Seeks Comment on How to Prevent Contraband Cell Phone Use in Prisons

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is seeking comment on technical approaches to preventing contraband cell phone use in prisons.

In a Notice of Inquiry published today in the Federal Register, NTIA is requesting information from the public on technologies that can significantly reduce or eliminate contraband cell phone use without negatively affecting commercial wireless and public safety services, including 911 calls and other government radio services, in areas surrounding prisons.

“The illicit use of cell phones by prisoners is a danger to public safety and must be addressed,” Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information and NTIA Administrator Lawrence E. Strickling said. “At the same time, we need to make sure that any technical solutions do not interfere with 911 calls, government or other legitimate cell phone use.”

Congress tasked NTIA with developing, in coordination with the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the National Institute of Justice, a plan to investigate and evaluate how wireless jamming of cell phone signals, detection of cell phone signals, and other technologies might be used in federal and state prison facilities to address the issue of contraband cell phone use by inmates. Public comments, due by June 11, 2010, will assist NTIA in developing this plan.

The U.S. Department of Commerce’s NTIA serves as the executive branch agency principally responsible for advising the President on communications and information policy. For more information about the NTIA, visit www.ntia.doc.gov.

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